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No. 16

An Essay

on

Amenorrhea

Paper

by

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of Brunswick, Virginia —

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The subject on which I am about to found my inaugural dissertation, is one with which every Physician ought to be well acquainted, but knowing my inability to render it justice, I must content myself to repeat that which has been said before me. The disease is Amenorrhea or suppression of the menses, one which involves the health & happiness of that noble creature woman; for, while labouring under this affection, she is an entire stranger to both. Before entering on the description of the disease, I think it will not be misplaced to say something on the causes & nature of the discharge, which qualifies woman for procreation, and without which, she is not capable of performing the great duties assigned to her by Nature. With regard to the causes of this periodical discharge, they are shrouded by so thick a curtain of obscurity, & their investigation is attended with such momentous difficulties, that in

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the prosecution of this subject, we have not a sufficient power of evidence to conduct us over the ardaous mound which divides the twilight region of probability, from the more luminous realm of demonstration and certainty. —

To submit a few remarks on the sentiments of those, who have turned their attention to the menstrual operation, may not be deemed irrelative to my subject, & especially, it may be necessary to premise a few observations on the signs & phenomena which precede & accompany this evolution. It is highly problematical, whether there be in the vegatable or animal kingdoms, any natural operation, in which there is so remarkable a revolution, as that, to which a young maid is subject, at the period of puberscence. Almost the whole body is changed. The universal form of the virgin becomes more soft & winning, the uterus enlarges, the marks of puberity appear, the bosom evolves, the countenance is more

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beautiful, the eyes sparkle, the step, the carriage, & the speech, in short, all is grace & elegance. The time at which the menstruous action takes place, is not the same in every individual. It varies according to climate, conditions of life, & various other causes. Girls in the warm regions are pubescent sooner, those in the cold later. The same is also true of the eruption of the menstrual fluid. This change is said to occur with the girls of Asia so early as the eighth or ninth year & they become mothers before they have completed their tenth. The girls of Britain, enjoying good health passes this function about the fourteenth year of their age. At this epoch they are more or less annoyed by unusual languidness, & weariness, a disposition to yawn, pains of the loins, of the stomach, & of the head, giddiness, inclination to vomit, & sometimes active vomiting; tumefaction and at times pains of the breasts, & other

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uncomfortable feelings. These sensations in a greater or less degree, continued at intervals until the fluid begins to pass off ~~from~~ the uterus
But should any impediment oppose its passage, through the uterus at this time, it has been observed to have some vicarious discharge, either from the nose, the lungs, the stomach, the fundament, the eyes, the gums, the nipples, the navel, or other unusual parts. This discharge of red fluid is proper to women during a considerable part of life, & is very necessary to the maintenance of health. It occurs monthly, the periods of gestation being excepted, at which time it very rarely takes place, but instances have been furnished, when this monthly discharge has regularly occured during the whole time of gestation. But these are very rare and are always to be considered as morbid. This menstrual fluid from the period at which it first flows returns periodically, every month & continues at each return about from

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[illegible] the causes of the effect in the operation. Some have traced the causes back to an [illegible] influence of the moon. These have endeavoured to prove that they resided in the qualities of the tide. Other parts of the ocean have traced at the matter, have attributed the causes, either to a local congestion of the blood vessels of the uterus, to a general attack of the whole body, or to an increased excitation at the different parts of the body or density of the [illegible]. But the new party generally have attributed to a secondary action of the uterus, under peculiar

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lunar influence. It may not be considered inappropriate to mention a few of the reasons by which the advocates of this opinion might establish their sentiments. I shall first premise some observations in opposition to the conjecture of the menstrual operation being attributable to lunar influence. If the moon rules in this affair, it is presumable that all women would be under the operation at the same time. This is not the fact, for at every period of lunation some one or other is under this operation. I would similarly ask, Why does not the menstrual action take place before fourteen or fifteen or why does it cease after forty or fifty years? Seeing that the female is during the whole time of life, equally exposed to lunar influence. But, other Physiologists, avoiding one extremes, have fallen into the other. The opinion advanced by some, that the menstrual operation derives its origin from too great a

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quantity or peculiar quality of the bile, rests upon ground as untenable & precarious as the sentiment above noticed. And to employ more time, concerning the incorrectness of those opinions would certainly be a waste of words. Another hypothesis touching the subject requires to be noticed. The menstrual operations have been conceived to depend, on a congestion of blood in the uterine arteries. This is the only one of the older hypotheses, which is now at all entertained. "That there is an increased determination of blood to the uterus, at the time of menstruation cannot be denied. But such is the case with every organ when excited by its appropriate stimulus; it becomes the centre of fluxion, to which blood is directed. This is common to the secretory organs though it is more [illegible] observable in those called into [illegible]. As the secretions are produced out of materials

substituted for the blood, the effect is not absolutely necessary to the due performance of the functions and duties, to be better as well known. But were the tubular accumulations the only circumstance in the process of menstruation, the discharge would be some blood which it is not exceptionable. Glands require for the secretion of their secretion, which is made by some structure intervening. The testicle is distinctly discernible as to the location of semen, at the time of the secretion, is called into action by an impulse from the ovaries. That the latter is true, is sufficiently proved by the fact, that where these organs are wanting, or much diseased, a retention or suppression of the menses is found to take place. The blood discharged in menstruation, says Mr Hunter is neither similar to blood taken from a vein at the same time, nor is it that extravasated by any accident

[illegible] part of the body. But it is a species of blood changed, separated, thrown off from the common mass by an action of the uterine vessels in a manner similar to secretion, but differing in the blood being not in a state fit for the vessels and capillaries. It differs from blood in many other respects in the want of fibrin. That menstruation is a genuine secretory action of the uterus, is now pretty generally admitted. It is not does a mucous surface with a congestion of blood vessels. From the most, at least, of the secretions are accomplished by the aid of the contractions of a few vessels spread through the substance of the stomach can secrete the gastric liquor. But may not the admitted more particular organization of the uterus adapt it for such an office? Since the blood sent to it is brought to the uterus in a quantity far more quickly than it does in the other vessels — on account of its peculiar

and narrowness of the veins in this region of the body; what could have been this wise provision in nature but for the purpose of secretion. What of the menstrual flux be but a visible influence of the moon, on the tide, or in motion of the blood, or to a fullness of the body; from what cause does it arise? From what causes proceeds the secretion of semen in the spermatic vessels? Assuredly from the enlarging, relaxing capacity of the testicles. In the same manner, also, does the menstrual action depend on a condition of the ovaries to be instantaneous. Hence this flux is to be received as a secretion from the uterine arteries, acting in obedience to an excitement derived from a matured condition of the Ovaries. From these facts, it is very clear in my estimation, that the menstrual action cannot be referred to any other cause, than a peculiar secreting action of the uterus, dependent on the ovaries, as a source of excitement,

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and in confirmation of it, the circumstances of the young woman from whom Percival Pott by not the removal the Cancer, might to adduce. Antecedant to the operation, this young woman was her menstrual operations regularly & at each time copiously, but after this unhappy affair her breasts wasted away, & all the phenomena attendant on them gradually disappeared & never afterwards returned. I shall now commence the history of Amenorrhea, but shall entirely confine my remarks to the division of it, Suppression of the menses — which is considered as of two kinds. The one where the menses do not begin to flow about the time they generally appear & the other, where after having made their appearance, they cease to return at their usual periods from other causes than conception. The term of Retention or Emmenia commonly has been applied to the former, that of suppression to the latter; which I shall only notice in this essay

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those which may be properly considered as cases of suppression, are such as occur after the flow has been established for sometime, in its regular course, and in which the mole cutoken cannot be referred to the causes of retention, but must be imputed to some resistance in the blood vessels of the uterus. According to a[illegible] the suppression occasioned by cold feet, a cooling [illegible], inactivity of body, & other causes, which may produce a constriction of these extreme vessels. Some have supposed an obstructing lenter of the fluids to occasion the resistance now mentioned, but this is purely hypothetical, without any proof or evidence of the fact, and it is based [illegible] improbable. There are many sorts of suppression that seem to depend upon a general debility of the system and consequent [illegible] vessels of the uterus. [illegible] — [illegible] to motion, [illegible] on the [illegible]

a sense of fullness at the heart, sometimes pains
in the back, but always in the back loins & hips,
flatulency & acidities in the stomach and bowels,
costiveness, & a sick uneasiness, says Dr. Hamilton, the
feculent odour of the breath, disordered stomach,
diminished appetite, and impaired digestion, which
preclude a sufficient supply of nutriment, at
a period of growth when it is most wanted,
[illegible] the [illegible] is premature appearance of the
[illegible] teeth and carries other marks together with
the symptoms which usually attend on this un-
[illegible] stamina in the system. The fore teeth
[illegible] are yellowish, and the molar teeth are
[illegible] & [illegible] also. The [illegible] and
[illegible] the [illegible] dwellings the breathing is much
increased by any vigorous exertion of the body, the pulse
is quick, but [illegible] & the [illegible] is a hot to be affected
with cases of the symptoms of [illegible] consu-
mes a great quantity of [illegible] discharge.

It is very common to meet with cases of subdepression where the pulse is active, the skin hot, the countenance flushed, face inflamed, eyes, accompanied by pain in the back of head, with vertigo or heavy uneasiness, sensations of fullness in different parts of the body. It is very frequently found in cases of long standing, but there is considerable disagreement as to the cause. I am in the same box of cases which I have seen and from the practice requisite to the radical cure of such cases I am inclined to think such to be the fact. When I restore these cases the remedies were directed to the liver as well as the uterus. Prognosis —

The prognosis in this disease is to be directed by the cause which has given rise to it, the length of time it has continued and the state of the persons health in other respects. If the disease is due to broken down tissue, it may be removed by pursuing the proper means, but if the disease has been of long standing, it is very difficult to cure, and it requires to cure

such cases as unfavourable. In those cases which have terminated fatally, in consequence of the long duration of the disease, on dissection, the aorta and uterus appear to be in a morbid state. —

Chlorosis. Dismissed as Amenorrhea is, very [illegible] in excessive debilitated [illegible] by [illegible] [illegible] will be found to be most invariably [illegible], at least in the commencement by the cold bath exercise change of air generous diet and by some of the tonics as Iron and some of the preparations of steel. It is [illegible] to [illegible] the prescribing medicines, the bated genus, but they seem to be invert. Where the dysmenorrhea depends on a constricted state of the uterine vessels, we [illegible] the removal of it by determining the blood into them more copiously, by purging, by the exercise of walking, by [illegible] by warm baths of [illegible] [illegible] of the uterine [illegible] may be [illegible], by the [illegible] of

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not the less necessary generally. [illegible] [illegible] [illegible], and the [illegible] pulse in secretion. If there be any Emmenagogue [illegible] [illegible] medicine to the [illegible] Emmenagogues [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] lungs [illegible] allied. [illegible] to meet with the depression [illegible] the pulse [illegible] plethoric, a flushed face, inflammation [illegible] neck, and loins. No one would hesitate to have recourse to the [illegible] the most prompt and decisive remedy, [illegible] as it were, the [illegible] [illegible] the danger which is apt to ensue from vicarious discharges determined either to the brain lungs or some other vital part. Nor should we neglect as auxiliary means to be employed to relieve, purgatives, to clear [illegible] in the large intestines which lie in the

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vicinity of the uterus. The various preparations of Aloes combined either with calomel or Myrrh have been much celebrated. Aloes always displays active Emmenagogue properties. With the same view of causing a determination to the parts, the daily use of a semicupium of warm salt water has been prescribed, to be continued for half an hour at a time and spinning at a small wheel. Amenorrhea as I have before said, is very frequently attended with hepatic derangement, & when this is the case purgatives should be exhibited daily, blood should be taken from the arm every two or three days, & calomel exhibited once or twice a week. The bleedings should be small & frequent, besides Sulph. Magnesia is to be given in small doses throughout the day and sometimes other cathartics should be used. This practice persisted in for some length of time, has entirely cured

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patients who have laboured under a suppression of the menses for some considerable time previous. There is one remedy used in this disease, which I have not mentioned ~~y~~ this I have never seen used, but from its high authority I cannot pass it over. It is the Volatile Tincture of Guaiac of Dr Davies. Emetics are very serviceable in this complaint. Diet should be light & nutritious, exercise moderate, warm clothing, and above all the patients feet should never be exposed to cold & wet ground.

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